

Bisexual erasure in the British print media: Representation of Tom Daley's coming out

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Abstract

In December 2013, British Olympic diver Tom Daley announced that he had begun dating a man, but was still attracted to women. In doing so he became the highest profile male athlete to disclose that he has bisexual attractions. This article provides a textual analysis of the British print media's reaction in the week after Daley's 'coming out' announcement, and examines whether the portrayal of him is consistent with the inclusive response to gay male athletes who have come out of the closet in recent years. Results indicate almost unanimous support for Daley's decision to come out. However, highlighting the processes of bisexual erasure, much of the print media labelled Daley as gay—rather than bisexual. This article thus highlights that the print media is ostensibly supportive of male sexual minority athletes; but the evidence we present suggests that the media are simultaneously significant in erasing bisexuality as a legitimate sexual orientation.

Keywords: *bisexuality; bisexual erasure; diving; media; celebrity, inclusive masculinity*

Introduction

Over the last two decades, British culture has seen significant improvements in attitudes towards sexual minorities (Clements and Field, 2014). Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people are now afforded greater social and legal rights than ever before, culminating in the legalization of same-sex marriage in England, Scotland and Wales in 2013¹. Despite persistent claims to the contrary (e.g. Butterworth, 2006; Caudwell, 2011), professional sports have also embraced social change—with openly LGB athletes more welcomed and celebrated than ever before (Anderson, Magrath & Bullingham, 2016). As Krane (2016, p. 238) writes: “Sport is entering a new era of inclusion and acceptance... This is a whole different landscape from what has occurred in the past.”

Even sport media, which has traditionally regulated and reproduced an orthodox, idealized form of masculinity for male athletes (Vincent & Crossman, 2008), are changing the approach they take when reporting upon gay men (McDonald & Eagles, 2012). Interestingly, however, despite increasingly positive attitudes toward bisexuality in British culture (Anderson & McCormack, 2016a), there have been very few openly bisexual male or female professional athletes in the media. Indeed, this list has been restricted to relatively low-profile sports or lesser-known athletes, such as Irene Wüst (speed skating), Nicola Adams (boxing), and Travon Free (basketball).

On 2 December, 2013, however, British cultural icon and Olympic diver, Tom Daley, became the most high-profile bisexual male athlete² in the world. His boyish good looks, attractive smile, charisma, and highly sculpted body—combined with his sporting success—have helped him develop as a British celebrity. Indeed, he frequently appears in various media,

including hosting his own television show, *Splash!* He also has a conspicuous presence across various social media (Brennan, 2016).

Daley made his announcement, simultaneously, through his Twitter and YouTube pages, tweeting to his fans that he had “something I need to say...[It’s] not been an easy decision to make, hope you can support me”—providing a link to his coming out video on YouTube. Here, he said he wanted to quell all rumors and speculation concerning his personal life—and his sexuality. In the video, he spoke of the heterosexist nature of media coverage:

One thing I’ve never been comfortable talking about is my relationships; even if I do sporting interviews, it’s, ‘Do you have a girlfriend? Who are you seeing?’...I’ve been dating girls and I’ve never really had a serious relationship...Now I feel ready...My life changed, massively. I met someone and they made me feel so happy and safe...And that someone is a guy.

Using social media to make his announcement permitted him the ability to craft his message the way he desired, without media interpretation. Here, we note the significant absence of the words ‘gay’ and ‘bisexual’, though he perhaps indicated his bisexual desires when he said: “Of course I still fancy girls.” Shortly after his initial announcement, it was reported on numerous occasions that Daley had *finally* identified as a gay man (Anderson & McCormack, 2016a). Three years later, when Daley married his male partner—American, Dustin Lance Black—many took it as the final piece of evidence for Daley’s homosexuality.

The purpose of this research is twofold. First, we examine the print media’s coverage of Daley’s coming out; and second, we examine the print media’s handling of bisexuality. Given the frequent coverage of Daley’s apparently ambiguous sexual orientation, it is important to note here that we examine the one-week period immediately after his initial announcement on his social media sites. Thus, by examining the intersection of sporting celebrity, bisexuality and inclusivity, we extend current theorizing of media analyses beyond gay and lesbian athletes

(Cleland, 2014; Forman & Plymire, 2005; Kian & Anderson, 2009; Kian, Anderson & Shipka, 2015; McDonald & Eagles, 2012; Plymire & Forman, 2001) by providing the first-ever analysis of the print media's response to an openly bisexual athlete.

Inclusive Masculinity and Bisexuality

There have been significant improvements in attitudes toward sexual minorities across the Western world in recent years. This is best evidenced by recent social and legal gains by the gay community—such as equal marriage in the United States and the United Kingdom—as well as an array of social attitude survey data, all of which have documented a marked shift toward inclusivity³ (Clements & Field, 2014; Twenge, Sherman & Walls, 2015).

Such findings of inclusivity are consistent with Inclusive Masculinity Theory (IMT) (Anderson, 2009). Where homophobia was once an expected trait of men's teamsports (Pronger, 1990), athletes and fans have developed increasingly positive attitudes toward homosexuality (Cashmore & Cleland, 2012; Cleland, Magrath & Kian, 2016; Magrath, 2017a, 2017b; Magrath, Anderson & Roberts, 2015). The central tenet of IMT is that positive attitudes toward sexual minorities generally facilitate a greater range of behaviors between men—without fear of being thought gay. Accordingly, recent studies have highlighted virtually unrestricted emotional intimacy between men and increased levels of physical tactility (Robinson, Anderson & White, 2017).

The increased range of gendered behaviors documented above has also problematized traditional understandings of sexuality, which has typically been understood as having three categories: heterosexuality, bisexuality, and homosexuality. However, the lack of flexibility within these categories has resulted in a growing body of research incorporating multiple sexual

identities along a sexuality continuum (see Savin-Williams, Cash, McCormack & Rieger, 2017). This means, for example, that men can engage in sex with other men without being labeled as gay—as was not the case in previous generations, where men were immediately homosexualized for doing so (Anderson, 2008). IMT thus provides a social constructionist perspective underpinning the increased acceptance for heterosexual men to engage in same-sex sexual behavior. Originally focused on positive attitudes toward homosexuality, it has since developed into the most prolific modern paradigm for conceptualizing contemporary masculinities (Anderson & McCormack, 2016b). It has also been useful in underpinning positive representation of gay athletes in the media (Cleland, 2014; Kian & Anderson, 2009; Kian *et al.*, 2015). But as Anderson and Adams (2011) and Morris, McCormack and Anderson (2014) show, this inclusivity now extends to more positive attitudes toward bisexuality.

Most relevant for this research, there has been a growing acceptance of those self-identifying as bisexual. This is a figure which has grown considerably in recent years: Gates (2011) shows that adults in the US are, marginally, more likely to identify as bisexual than lesbian or gay. Replicable findings are apparent in the UK, where the government's Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported in October 2016 that the number of British people identifying as bisexual had almost doubled in three years. Most recently, Anderson and McCormack's (2016a) longitudinal research has shown that the stigma attached for bisexual individuals has significantly reduced—particularly among younger cohorts.

Sporting cultures have also witnessed significant social change, and have evolved into a positive environment for sexual minorities (Anderson *et al.*, 2016; Magrath, 2017a). It is important to remember, however, that sexual minorities are not a homogenous group: despite a liberalizing culture for gay and lesbian athletes, there has been limited academic attention

afforded to bisexuality. But because attitudes toward bisexuality have been tightly linked with society's general disposition toward homosexuality (Hubbard & deVisser, 2014), we should, according to Anderson *et al.* (2016, p. 10), '...expect the experiences of bisexual men and women in sport to mirror that of lesbian and gay men'. Indeed, the limited research on bisexuality and sport supports this line of argument.

Anderson and Adams' (2011) research with 60 American football players across three universities in the US shows that athletes intellectualize highly complex and positive understandings of bisexuality and, more importantly, "the vast majority recognize bisexuality as a legitimate sexuality for men" (p. 16). Even so, participants did not know openly bisexual players and while men recognized bisexuality in themselves, they still identified as heterosexual. The media has altered their coverage of gay and male athletes in recent years, too. When former NBA player John Amaechi came out in 2007, Kian and Anderson (2009) showed that the media rejected the domineering, homophobic behaviors and attitudes associated with orthodox masculinity. Similarly, when Jason Collins became the first active male athlete in North America's main four sports, Kian *et al.* (2015) again show that the media adopted an inclusive perspective on homosexuality, even characterizing Collins as a "courageous hero." In the UK, Cleland (2014) documents comparable media support for Anton Hysén, a semiprofessional Swedish footballer. And perhaps of most relevance to this article, one of Daley's competitors—openly gay Australian diver Matthew Mitcham—achieved celebrity status after winning a gold medal at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games; thus becoming an attractive and marketable LGB figurehead (McDonald & Eagles, 2012).

Accordingly, the positive coverage of these elite athletes highlights the changing nature of the complex relationship between the media and the issue of gay athleticism. But despite the

growing number of openly gay and lesbian athletes receiving significant media attention, there is no research concerning openly bisexual athletes in the media.

Bisexual Burden

Sociological research conducted in the 20th century documented that gay and lesbians typically faced high levels of discrimination in Western cultures (Loftus, 2001). At this time, gay and lesbian athletes were frequently targeted and were frequently subjected to discursive and often violent forms of homophobia (Pronger, 1990). This research is concordant with the way gays and lesbians were treated in society (Pollack, 1998). Bisexuality during this time, however, was largely unexamined in the sport literature, and until this article, there remains no academic work on the experience of bisexuals in sport.

For bisexual men in the 20th century, biphobia was a greater social problem than homophobia; principally because they experienced hostility from both straight and gay communities (Herek, 2002). Anderson, McCormack and Ripley (2016) therefore present the notion of “bisexual burden” in order to represent the myriad of problems that bisexuals face beyond those experienced by gays and lesbians. Problematically, however, there is no single reason for biphobia. Much of it may be linked with anti-gay animus, although given the sexualized nature of stereotypes concerning bisexuality, biphobia is particularly focused on behaviors rather than identity. Another component may also be that during the early stages of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s in the West, bisexual men were thought responsible for the spread of HIV to heterosexuals (Stokes, Taywaditep, Vanable & McKirnan, 1996), despite the fact that just one per cent of annual HIV infections were being transmitted by bisexual men to female partners at the time (Kahn, Gurvey, Pollack, Binson & Catania, 1997).

There is also increased social hardship for bisexuals, even in an absence of antipathy toward them. Zivony and Lobel (2014) argue that these hardships are rooted in stereotypes. Indeed, types of bisexual burden are numerous. In reviewing the literature on bisexual burden, Anderson and McCormack (2016) highlight 11 distinct kinds: they argue bisexuals are stigmatized as being 1) neurotic, 2) unable to love, 3) sex crazed and 4) less capable of monogamy than those attracted to a single sex. In addition to these factors, bisexuals also suffer from 5) negative stereotypes about their identities from other sexual minorities, 6) being thought as confused about their sexual orientation, or 7) seen as being within a transitional phase (see also Diamond, 2008). As a result, bisexuals are accused of 8) attention seeking, and 9) not being brave enough to fully come out (see also Eliason, 1997).

Bisexual burden is particularly apparent in relationships. For example, when bisexuals are in a relationship with someone of a different sex, they are 10) frequently accused of holding on to heterosexual privilege (Burlison, 2005); yet when they are in a relationship with the same sex, they are 11), perceived as gay (Yost & Thomas, 2012) or accused of not being wholly out; again, being seen to cling to straight privilege (Firestein, 2007). These forms of burden are not an exhaustive list, but highlight the existence of a set of practices and beliefs that set bisexuals apart from gays and lesbians in the social processes that esteem heterosexuality in society.

In addition to these 11 burdens, we suggest a few more, slightly distinct additions: 12) Bisexuals also face unique issues when coming out (Anderson & McCormack, 2016a). Primarily, bisexuals' experiences of disclosing their sexual identity have traditionally been characterized by a consistent expectation to defend the legitimacy of bisexuality (Page, 2004), particularly against the stereotypes that bisexuals are confused, greedy or in denial about being

gay (Klein, 1993). These burdens are outlined in greater detail in Anderson and McCormack's (2016a) recent research on bisexuality in the UK and US.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of bisexual burden, however, resides in what is referred to as bisexual erasure. Bisexuality has traditionally been erased in UK and US cultures by heterosexist norms and monosexist attitudes (Anderson & McCormack, 2016a). Earlier research (e.g. Blumstein & Schwartz, 1974) highlighted that, unlike gay and lesbians, this is partially attributable to the lack of a substantial bisexual community. More contemporarily, though, bisexual erasure also occurs through a process of what Anderson (2008) calls "the one-time rule of homosexuality." Here, one same-sex experience is socially perceived as indicative of being 'entirely' gay, erasing bisexuality as a possible identity (Yost & Thomas, 2012). This perception is likely influenced using derogatory words such as 'fag' and 'queer' to describe gay men in times of high homophobia (Thurlow, 2001). The use of *homophobic* epithets rather than biphobic ones serves to further consolidate the binary of sexuality—while it may mean that bisexuals are less overtly stigmatized, it also makes their identities less visible.

This is partially accomplished through the privileging of heterosexuality; something known as heterosexism. This form of sexual hegemony represents heterosexuality as ideal and all other sexualities as inferior. The differences between bisexuals, gays, pansexuals, omnisexuals and others are conflated because all that matters in a heterosexist, monosexist culture is whether one is straight or not. Thus, our cultural predisposition to exclusive binary categories is exacerbated by a culture that privileges heterosexuality, meaning that despite maintaining numerical dominance compared to gays and lesbians (Pew, 2013), bisexuality is erased a distinct identity category.

Something often overlooked by the research on bisexuality is the effect of self-erasure. Significant data shows that bisexual people are more likely to be closeted compared to gay men and lesbians: Pew (2013) showed this to be just 28%, compared to 71% of lesbians and 77% of gay men. Whereas 53% of gay men have told their father, only 24% of bisexuals have. In addition, the Pew (2013) survey also found that only 11% of bisexual people said most of their closest co-workers knew about their sexual orientation, compared to 48% of gay men and 50% of lesbians. This is largely attributable to fear for the lack of acceptance, which also explains why bisexuals are significantly more likely to date someone of the opposite sex (see Anderson & McCormack, 2016a).

Accordingly, such statistics suggest that a gay identity is more important to gay men than a bisexual identity is to bisexual men. Thus, it is unsurprising that when Pew asked their participants about the importance of their identity specifically, only 25% of gay men said that it was not important to them, whereas 54% of bisexuals said this. While it might be progressive to argue that one's sexual minority status is unimportant (Savin-Williams, 2005), there are political ramifications for this position in a culture in which power and privilege are distributed unequally to heterosexuals. This research thus examines not only for inclusivity of homosexuality in the reporting of Daley, but how his declared sexual interests in both men and women is regarded.

Method

We conducted a textual analysis (see Silverman, 2001) of all print media articles located on the newspaper database *ProQuest* within a one-week period from 2 December 2013 (the date Tom Daley's video first appeared on YouTube). This allowed ample time for the print media to adequately report on the story, as well as gauging public opinion. Further, this also allowed for

the publication of weekly newspaper columns which may have also covered the story. Textual analysis is a subjective approach which allows researchers to uncover and interpret implicit and explicit meanings in a range of textual data (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Accordingly, textual analyses typically omit numerical and statistical data, instead maintaining a commitment to narrative detail.

Preliminary searches revealed 162 articles or editorials covering Daley's announcement. This was then reduced to British newspapers, which provided 67 articles over the research period. Once duplications and wire reports were removed, a total of 43 articles were analyzed, predominantly published within a mixture of high-profile broadsheet and tabloid newspapers, including: *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, in addition to any British and/or weekend variants of these newspapers.

While some scholars prefer a numeric content analysis of the media (Pedersen, 2002), the majority instead focus on providing an interpretative analysis of the text itself. This is the same approach adopted by others in similar research focusing on attitudes toward homosexuality following announcements by professional athletes (Cleland, 2014; Kian & Anderson, 2009; Kian *et al.*, 2015; McDonald & Eagles, 2012). Because this approach relies upon subjective interpretation, all researchers worked independently using inductive levels of coding to highlight consistent themes within the articles analyzed (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Once notes had been compared, we began drawing out the main themes surrounding the print media's narrative toward Daley, and the announcement of his sexuality. The analytical methods employed throughout this process ensured the validity of the approach taken, and the use of multiple and independent coding enhanced inter-rater reliability and the trustworthiness of results.

Following the completion of data analysis, we identified two dominant themes: (1) Overwhelming support of Daley's sexuality—inclusivity in the print media; (2) Daley's sexuality as a “non-issue;” (3) Evidence of bisexuality in the print media.

Results

Inclusivity in the Print Media

Although the print media have played a significant role in facilitating ‘acceptable’ forms of masculinity (Nylund, 2004; Vincent & Crossman, 2008), more recent research has documented that media framing of openly gay male athletes has been largely positive (Cleland, 2014; Kian & Anderson, 2009; Kian *et al.*, 2015; McDonald & Eagles, 2012). This has been coupled with praise for the bravery which gay athletes show in coming out, particularly given sport's often fractious relationship with homosexuality (Pronger, 1990). By contrast, however, research on openly bisexual male athletes' coverage in the print media has been virtually non-existent, partially at least, because very few high-profile athletes have come out as bisexual.

We show that the most salient finding in the print media's coverage of Tom Daley's coming out announcement was almost unanimously positive—even among papers known for social conservatism in the UK (Conboy, 2006). For example, Amanda Platell of the *Daily Mail*, wrote that, “Daley was rightly applauded for coming out and admitting he's in a serious relationship with a man” (7 December, 2013). John MacLeod wrote that Daley's coming out made him “more of a national treasure than ever” (*Daily Mail*, 7 December, 2013), while Jim White argued that, because of his international renown and young age, “Daley is by far the most prominent British sportsman to come out... This is something that matters because it might make a difference” (*Daily Telegraph*, 2 December, 2013). In *The Observer*, Tim Adams wrote that

Daley's coming out video was "wonderfully disarming," praising Daley for his announcement (8 December, 2013).

In *The Times*, Simon Barnes wrote that sport has traditionally suffered from "unreconstructed male chauvinism and vindictive homophobia," before praising Daley's coming out as a brave decision (6 December, 2013). Barnes was not alone in praising Daley's bravery: Polly Hudson of the *Daily Mirror* wrote, "Bravo Tom Daley. It takes a lot of guts to reveal you're a bloke who's sleeping with a bloke" (6 December, 2013), and Ellen Jones wrote of the impact that Daley's announcement may have on closeted LGB youth: "We've been thanking Tom Daley since last week for making it that little bit easier for teenagers to come out as bisexual or gay" (*The Independent*, 10 December, 2013). Similarly, in describing Daley's video as "heartfelt and touching," Joe Stone remarked that, "Outing himself as anything other than heterosexual was brave – he didn't have to" (*The Guardian* 2, 4 December, 2013). And in a short article in *The Sun*, he was described as a "brave trailblazer," before being named as their "hero of the week" (3 December, 2013).

Such positivity is evidence that, on the surface at least, the positive coverage of openly gay athletes also extends to bisexual male athletes, too. This argument also includes the increasing stigma of homophobia in contemporary society (McCormack, 2012). Indeed, when, shortly after Daley posted his video on social media, a small number of abusive and homophobic posts were directed toward him, they were strongly condemned by a number of newspapers. Perhaps most interestingly, given its association with right-wing ideologies, *The Sun* described the abuse Daley suffered on Twitter as "an open sewer of spite, malice and small-minded bile...with the mind of a Seventies sitcom." Its author, Tony Parsons, then followed this up by referencing the overwhelming levels of support: "It was amazing to see the social network site so

supportive...Tom Daley is an inspiration to any kid out there who has to stand up to bullies” (*The Sun*, 9 December, 2013).

Along a similar theme, Andrew Pierce, an openly gay British journalist who writes for the near-equally conservative *Daily Mail* newspaper, wrote: “Daley was brave enough to take the risk—and by coming out so young and so soon he sent a powerful message to the homophobic bullies in the playground and on the internet” (4 December, 2013). The print media’s condemning of Daley’s Twitter abuse is, again, further evidence that their coverage of sexual minority professional athletes has shifted, almost completely, toward one of acceptance. This is further supported by claims that an athlete’s sexuality is something which should not be deemed newsworthy.

Sexuality as a “Non-Issue”

While the celebrity status of many professional athletes means that their private lives are frequently front-page news in British mainstream media (Andrews & Jackson, 2002), many members of the press suggested that Tom Daley’s sexuality was a non-issue. In the *Daily Record*, for example, Joan Burnie dismissively wrote: “Tom Daley says he is in a relationship with a man. His business. Nothing for anyone, gay or straight, to see, so move along please” (6 December, 2013). Similarly, Leslie Roberts asked: “Why is everyone speculating about the sexuality of a 19-year-old boy? What difference does it make to anyone but Tom?” (*Sunday Mail*, 8 December, 2013), and Carole Malone asked: “How come the sexuality of an Olympic hero is such big news?” (*Sunday Mirror*, 8 December, 2013).

In her weekly column for in *The People*, television personality Carol McGiffin suggested that she was “flummoxed” as to why Daley made such an announcement, before acknowledging

the “pressure on public figures to divulge their sexuality” (8 December, 2013). Indeed, the significant interest and media pressure on athletes was alluded to by Daley, on his need to silence the rumors of his sexuality.

While the assertions of sexuality as a non-issue could be interpreted as a heterosexist attempt by some members of the media to silence or trivialize discussions of sexual minority athletes (Griffin, 1998), we reject such claims here. This may have been true in previous eras, where the influence of *don't ask, don't tell* was strong (Plymire & Forman, 2001), but this is not necessarily the case in a culture of inclusivity—where LGB athletes are more accepted and celebrated than ever before (Anderson *et al.*, 2016). Although some of this reporting may be heterosexist in nature, we take the vast majority of comments as evidence of support, attempts to not unnecessarily magnify an athlete's sexual orientation. As previous research has documented, this is especially true for gay and lesbian athletes: however, more significant issues of bisexual erasure were apparent when discussing Tom Daley.

Bisexual Erasure in the Print Media

The previous two sections have outlined general positivity toward Daley's sexuality. Problematically, however, despite the print media's acceptance and support, missing from all of these narratives is explicit recognition of his statement of being attracted to both men and women. Although not using the label bisexual, Daley has still come out as the first-ever high profile bisexual male athlete. This media erasure is, of course, partly a reflection of the unwillingness to identify him as bisexual. In a culture in which bisexuality is effectively erased, this made it easier for some to polarize sexuality into gay and straight. Illustrating this, a

consistent finding in our analysis was that numerous members of the print media referred to Daley either as a “gay athlete,” “gay man,” or being in a “gay relationship.”

In the *Daily Mail*, for example, Martin Samuel wrote about Daley as “an athlete who has come out as gay,” while Dave Kidd wrote of “Tom Daley’s revelation that he is gay” (*The People*, 8 December, 2013). Even after being praised and supported for his announcement, Daley was still being consistently referred to as a gay man. Liz Jones, for example, wrote of the “courage of Tom Daley...coming out as gay” (*Mail on Sunday*, 8 December, 2013). Even more curiously, numerous other members of the print media compared to Daley to *other gay athletes*, again overlooking his stated attractions to both sexes.

Other writers avoided using a gay or bisexual label altogether. While this might seem to be a more progressive approach—further evidence that one’s sexuality is not deemed to be newsworthy—it can also be interpreted as implying that he’s not certain himself. For example, many writers drew on stereotypes in claiming that Daley’s announcement was unsurprising, with some also mocking the supposed link between homosexuality, or in this case bisexuality, and diving. Nichi Hodgson, for example, commented on the reaction following Daley’s announcement, writing: “Finally! We thought you were the last to know, hon” (*The Guardian*, 2 December, 2013). In *The Sun*, Katie Hopkins sarcastically wrote, “Well knock me down with a feather. Tom Daley has come out and said he is a seeing a man,” before adding: “Synchronised diving is only a hop and skip away from ballet so the journey Tom had to take was not such a tough one” (6 December, 2013).

In *The People*, Dave Kidd wrote that Daley’s announcement “would not have had too many people falling off their seats in astonishment” (8 December, 2013). Having previously met and interviewed Daley, David Walsh of *The Times*, wrote that, “Daley is a likeable chap, very

straightforward, open and endearing,” before commenting that he was “not remotely surprised” to learn that Daley was in relationship with another man. Despite the print media’s general support of Daley, such comments also indicate how certain members of the media continue to draw upon historic masculine stereotypes attached to certain sports (Vincent & Crossman, 2008)—such as diving—while simultaneously erasing explicit discussions of bisexuality.

Indeed, only four of the 43 print media articles explicitly referred to bisexuality. In *The Observer*, Tim Adams employed ambiguous phrasing when discussing Daley’s sexuality, referring to his “very direct public announcement that he was a gay (or bisexual) sportsman” (8 December, 2013). But from a more positive perspective, Patrick McAleenan offered a detailed and methodical analysis on the increased levels of stigma for bisexual men, first describing it as a “hidden problem,” before describing Daley as “the most notable famous [bisexual] man” in contemporary society (*Daily Telegraph*, 5 December, 2013). It is of course possible, however, that Daley’s failure to identify as, categorically, either gay or bisexual influenced the coverage of him in the media.

Daley’s failure to explicitly identify under the LGBT alphabet—specifically through the phrase “of course I still fancy girls”—led to some critical attention on both social media, as well as certain sections of the print media. Illustrating support for Daley, however, Sheeran Nanjiani defended Daley’s vernacular, writing: “Give him a break, he’s only 19. Maybe he’s still figuring it out or maybe Tom represents a generation who are so comfortable in their own skin they don’t need labels to be secure in who they are” (*The Sun*, 8 December, 2013). In *The Guardian*, Nicki Hodgson provided a detailed critique of the print media for their reporting of Daley. She wrote:

The mainstream media can’t quite get it straight, in any sense of the phrase...He [Daley] does not once mention the word ‘gay’, nor the phrases ‘gay relationship’ or ‘coming out’...So what do the media go and do? Why, label him of course.

While Hodgson is deeply critical of the print media's coverage of Daley, also in *The Guardian*, Joe Stone suggested that:

By not defining himself under the LGBT acronym, he is likely to have encouraged other young people to freely explore their own sexualities, without feeling welded to loaded terms that cannot ever hope to accurately describe the fluidity of many people's sexuality (4 December, 2013).

Problematically, however, in our analysis, we found that balance provided in the latter two articles was significantly lacking. Despite the general coverage of Daley—and sexual minorities—being overwhelmingly positive, bisexual erasure was prominent throughout members of the print media.

Discussion

While the media has traditionally focused on the presentation of historically masculine traits, avoiding discussions surrounding homosexuality in male athletes (Vincent & Crossman, 2008), recent years have seen a shift in the coverage of gay and lesbian athletes in the print media; one toward acceptance and overt support. This is best evidenced by the increasing number of openly gay male athletes being positively represented in the print media following their coming out (Cleland, 2014; Kian & Anderson, 2009; Kian *et al.*, 2015; McDonald & Eagles, 2012)—as well as journalists demonstrating greater sensitivity when breaking a news story about a gay athlete (Kian, Anderson, Vincent & Murray, 2015).

Focusing on the print media's coverage of British Olympic diver Tom Daley's announcement that he was in a relationship with a man, this research differs from existing research on media coverage of lesbian and gay athletes because it focuses on an athlete who had essentially come out as bisexual, rather than gay. Although bisexuals have typically experienced

cultural erasure of their sexualities, as well as higher rates of discrimination than gay and lesbian individuals (Herek, 2002), more recent research has shown greater levels of acceptance (Anderson & McCormack, 2016a; Morris *et al.*, 2014).

The findings presented in this research are broadly consistent with contemporary research on media reaction to gay athletes. Daley was generally received positively by members of the print media and, like gay NBA player Jason Collins (Kian *et al.*, 2015), was frequently praised for his bravery and subsequent status as a role model for sexual minority youth. Also congruent with previous research (e.g. Brennan, 2016), some writers drew on stereotypes associated with participation in so-called feminized sports like diving to claim that it was no surprise that Daley was dating a man. Thus, although the print media have paralleled decreasing homophobia in wider culture, there is still the existence of stereotypes about an athlete's sexuality—something which could have a negative impact on minority groups' participation in sport (Knight & Giuliano, 2001).

There was also strong evidence of bisexual erasure in the print media's coverage of Daley. Although he does not make explicit reference to being *bisexual* in his coming out video, Daley's comment of continuing to hold sexual desires for girls leads us to argue that even if he does not identify as such, his sexual desires are consistent with bisexuality. The print media failed to highlight that Daley was the first-ever famous male athlete to come out as something other than gay. On many occasions, he was even wrongfully identified as a gay man. So, while Anderson and McCormack (2016a) argue that the increased visibility of the bisexual community has partially occurred due to increased visibility through the media (see also Raley & Lucas, 2006), the evidence we present here suggests that the print media are simultaneously significant

in reducing stigma against sexual minorities, but erasing bisexuality as a legitimate sexual orientation.

The way in which made this announcement is also worthy of critical attention here. In the past, gay and lesbian athletes have relied on what we could now label as ‘traditional’ methods of coming out—such as autobiographies or magazine articles. Using two popular forms of social media—Twitter and YouTube—to make his announcement can therefore be recognized as an emerging method through which LGB athletes can tell their story. Indeed, openly lesbian British sports broadcaster Clare Balding commented on national television: “If YouTube had been around 10 years ago, that’s probably what I’d have done.” Thus, the significance of employing social media as a tool for this purpose should not be underestimated. Indeed, employing this method to come out also disallows the potential for questions regarding his private life.

We cannot, however, from this research, suggest why Daley did not publicly identify as bisexual in his coming out video. The failure to do so is consistent with research on bisexuals (Pew 2013), which shows that their sexual identity label is not as important to them as self-identification is for gay men. Daley’s lack of identification with bisexuality may germinate from his own self-erasure; conversely, he may be gay and just stated that he is still interested in women out of fear of losing that commercial fan base.

Another explanation for Daley’s lack of explicit identification with bisexuality could be that he may find sexual and/or romantic attraction to both men and women but desires to promote postmodern ways of showing that one’s sexual attractions should not be important. It could also be evidence of what Gonzalez, Ramirez and Galupo (2017) refer to as “bisexual marking”—when an individual exhibits certain behaviors commonly associated with, and interpreted as, bisexuality (see also Morgan & Davis-Delano, 2016). In this case, by employing

the phrase “of course I still fancy girls” is perhaps Daley’s intention of outwardly conveying his bisexuality. Alternatively, it could also be that he identifies as what is understood in emergent contemporary research as being “mostly gay” (Savin-Williams *et al.*, 2017)—that he holds minimal, but some, sexual desire for girls.

The emergence of literature documenting the expansion of contemporary sexual identities is evidence of Anderson’s (2009) Inclusive Masculinity Theory, in that it indicates a reduction of the one-time rule of homosexuality (Anderson, 2008). While this theory has been predominantly used to conceptualize increasingly positive attitudes toward homosexuality—and the broader range of gendered behaviors associated with it (Anderson & McCormack, 2015)—it has also been used to theorize the increasing acceptance of bisexual men, too (Anderson & McCormack, 2016a; Morris *et al.*, 2014).

The current research is the first to apply IMT to the coming out of a professional bisexual male athlete. While the overwhelmingly positive coverage of Daley’s sexuality supports the theory, there are also more problematic findings. Indeed, the prevalence of bisexual erasure—the consistent refusal to acknowledge Daley’s bisexuality, frequently referring to him as a gay man—also suggests that the increased acceptance of gay athletes in the print media (Cleland, 2014; Kian & Anderson, 2009; Kian *et al.*, 2015) does not extend to bisexual athletes in the same way. Consequently, we argue that the findings presented in this article both support and undermine Inclusive Masculinity Theory, and call for more media analyses of bisexual athletes.

It is also important to note that all forms of media have “the potential to shape and influence, thoughts, opinions, values, and beliefs in many different ways” (Cleland, 2013, p. 1283). As societal attitudes toward bisexuality continue to improve (Anderson & McCormack,

2016a; Morris *et al.*, 2014), we argue that the media plays a pivotal role in the representation of bisexual individuals in sport—much in the same way as it has with openly gay male athletes.

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¹ Although legislation permitting same-sex marriage in England and Wales was passed in 2013, the first same-sex weddings did not take place until March 2014. In Scotland, legislation was passed and came into force in the same year.

² While Tom Daley may not have publicly declared himself as 'bisexual', we argue that his comments in his 'coming out' speech are evidence that he identifies as such.

³ Best evidencing this, the most recent social attitude survey data in the UK has indicated that only 22% of those sampled believe same-sex sex to be 'always wrong', compared to 64% in 1987. Similar patterns have emerged in the US, where Pew data has reflected the shift toward inclusivity.